

# The San Diego Union-Tribune.

## **It's broken. Fix it** ***Dems should heed Chiang, Lockyer***

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Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger likes to pick the brains of others who can help him figure out how to deal with the problems he faces as leader of the nation's largest state.

This prompted him to have a talk with a well-known former Democratic Arkansas governor, who waxed rhapsodic about the virtues of a state "rainy day" fund. When times were good and revenue was flush, some of the windfall was set aside for the inevitable future years when revenue was sluggish or down. Priorities were predefined, so the most important programs would be protected. This approach, said Bill Clinton, was a common-sense way to avoid the boom-and-bust cycle that afflicts states dependent on volatile sources of income.

But when Schwarzenegger proposed just such a way of smoothing out the budget process, establishing priorities and capping spending in his State of the State speech, Democrats depicted such a constitutional reform not as common sense but as either crass social Darwinism or a stunt.

Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez warned that this prudent approach was actually a de facto assault on "the elderly, the blind and the disabled" – even though the agency that helps those groups hasn't shared in the spending binge of recent years. Assemblywoman Noreen Evans, D-Santa Rosa, saw "smoke and mirrors" tactics at work.

In other words, Núñez, Evans and most Democrats in the Legislature prefer a status quo in which millions of people who depend on state programs are jerked around every year depending on whether California's wealthiest taxpayers – the key source of state revenue – are rolling in capital gains.

We think these lawmakers should heed two statewide officeholders besides Schwarzenegger: Controller John Chiang and Treasurer Bill Lockyer, both Democrats.

In an interview yesterday, Chiang said the public was “sick and tired” of Sacramento's frequent fiscal crises. While not specifically endorsing the governor's proposal, Chiang said it was time legislators began “to prioritize what is of the highest value” and adopt reforms to end the practice of rolling over fiscal “obligations from one year to the next year.”

Last year, Lockyer made similar remarks about needing to prioritize spending. Yesterday, his spokesman, Tom Dresslar, said the treasurer thought a “rainy day” approach had to protect K-14 schools funding and that reform should extend to revenue as well as spending, but that the governor had offered “good ideas in principle.”

Well, that's a relief. There are at least a few adults among Sacramento's most powerful Democrats.

The funny twist to all of this is the arguments being made in support of Proposition 93, the Feb. 5 initiative that would relax term limits and allow Núñez , Senate President Don Perata and 40 other termed-out legislators to stay in office. Those arguments hold that it would be horrible for the state if all these veteran lawmakers with all their cumulative smarts and institutional knowledge were forced to the sidelines.

Look at the irresponsible reaction of this bunch to the budget crisis, and it's close to impossible to figure out how they would be missed.

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